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Waiver Wise

Technical Assistance for the Community Options Program Waiver COP-W

Wisconsin Department of Health & Family Services • Division of Disability and Elder Services
Bureau of Aging & Long Term Care Resources

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Universal Services Fund

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The Wisconsin Public Service Commission currently administers three programs designed to offset the ever-increasing cost of telecommunications services. The programs, which are all funded as part of the Universal Service Fund (USF), are called “Lifeline”, “Link-up America” and “TEPP” (the Telecommunication Equipment Purchase Program).

Lifeline

The Lifeline program reduces monthly charges for eligible telephone subscribers by providing a reduction in the cost of basic telephone service. Basic telephone services include emergency service (including 9-1-1 where available), alternate toll carriers, operator service, directory assistance, and telecommunication relay services. The *minimum* cost savings that is provided under the Lifeline program is \$8.50 per month. If needed, a higher credit can be awarded so that the monthly bill is no more than \$15 per month for basic service, including 120 local calls per month.

Link-up

The Link-up America Program is designed to provide a waiver of basic charges associated with telephone installation and service start-up to eligible households. These charges include reconnection of existing service as well as new installation and telephone service when moving from one residence to another. The extent of these benefits is at the discretion of the local telephone service provider.

Eligibility and Application

The Lifeline and Link-up programs are available to low-income households. A household will be considered “low-income” if it is eligible for any of the following programs: Medical Assistance, Food Stamps, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Wisconsin’s Home Energy Assistance Program (WHEAP), or the Wisconsin Homestead Tax Credit. Residents of tribal lands may also qualify by participating in a federal tribal assistance program.

To apply for Lifeline and Link-up, interested individuals should contact their local telephone company. They can call the customer service number printed on their monthly telephone bill, or call the customer service number that appears in the front of their phone book. The telephone company will need to verify that the household meets eligibility requirements.

Telecommunications Equipment Purchase Program (TEPP)

The TEPP program provides vouchers to individuals with disabilities so they may purchase equipment they need to use telephone services in their home. Examples of such equipment are amplification phones and TTY machines for people with hearing impairments, and hands-free telephones for those with mobility impairments. Individuals are eligible to receive the TEPP benefit only once every three years for the same disability.

Individuals use the vouchers by presenting them to the equipment vendor for payment. There is a \$100 co-payment for each TEPP voucher, except for the hard of hearing voucher for which there is no co-payment. If the applicant is low-income and deaf, deaf and blind, or hard of hearing, there are funds available to cover the co-payments. (The funds come from the Telecommunications Assistance Program (TAP) of the Bureau for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.)

When a TEPP customer makes a purchase, the vendor submits the voucher and a copy of the invoice to the Universal Service Fund (USF) administrator. The administrator pays the vendor for the face amount of the voucher (or less if the purchase price was less than the voucher value plus the \$100 co-payment). If the purchase price is more than the total of the \$100 co-payment and the voucher value, the customer will have to pay the additional amount.

Vouchers are limited to the following amounts by category of disability:

- \$200 for hard of hearing (no co-payment required);
- \$800 for deaf/severely hard of hearing;
- \$1,600 for speech impairment;
- \$1,600 for mobility impairment;
- \$2,500 for deaf with low vision; and
- \$7,200 for deaf-blind.

Note: COP-Waiver funds may be used to pay for any required co-payment or to offset the difference in cost between the voucher amount and actual cost of the equipment.

Eligibility and Application

Benefits under TEPP are available to all Wisconsin residents, regardless of age or income, if they have a disability that comes under one of the categories listed above.

A one-page application can be used to apply for a TEPP voucher. Completed applications should be sent to the administrator of the USF at:

**USF Fund Administrator
c/o Williams Young, LLC
P.O. Box 8700
Madison, Wisconsin 53708-8700**

Or fax to:

**USF Fund Administrator
(608) 274-8085**

To access an online TEPP application or for more information on the TEPP program, the Statewide Equipment Demonstration and Loan Network, or for a list of vendors, please see the TEPP website at http://psc.wi.gov/consumer/telecom/tepp/ind_tepp.htm.